



Recent Studies of Drug Courts and DWI Courts: Crime Reduction and Cost Savings

Doug B. Marlowe, J.D. Ph.D., Chief of Science, Law and Policy

In February of 2005, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2005) issued its third comprehensive report on the effects of adult criminal drug courts. At the time, results of 23 program evaluations confirmed that drug courts significantly reduced crime. In addition, although up-front costs were somewhat higher for drug courts than for standard probation, drug courts were determined to be more cost-effective because they avoided expenditures related to law enforcement efforts, judicial case-processing and victimization resulting from future criminal activity. In the ensuing years, researchers have continued to uncover definitive evidence for the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of drug courts.

Meta-Analyses

The most rigorous and conservative measurement of the effect of any program is derived from what scientists call *meta-analysis*. This involves statistically averaging the effects of a program over dozens of research studies. Five independent meta-analyses have now concluded that adult drug courts significantly reduce crime by an average of 8 to 26 percentage points (see Table 1). Importantly, because these figures reflect *average* effects, they also include drug court programs that were new or were not well implemented. Well-administered drug courts were found to reduce crime rates by as much as *35 percent*.

Table 1: Summary of Drug Court Meta-Analyses

Citation	Institution	No. of Drug Courts Included	These Drug Courts Reduced Crime By an <u>Average of . . .</u>	The Most Effective Drug Courts . . .
Wilson et al. (2006)	Campbell Collaborative	55	26%	•used a single model (pre-plea or post-plea)
Latimer et al (2006)	Canada Dept. of Justice	66	14%	•treated adults •were 12 to 18 months long •had longer follow-ups
Shaffer (2006)	University of Nevada	76	9%	•treated adults •were pre-adjudication •were 8 to 16 months long •treated methamphetamine abusers
Lowenkamp et al. (2005)	University of Cincinnati	22	8%	•treated high-risk clients •had 2-year follow-ups
Aos et al. (2006)	Washington State Institute for Public Policy	57	8%	N/A

Program Evaluations

Numerous drug court and DWI court program evaluations have reported similar findings. Table 2 summarizes re-arrest rates from recent drug court and DWI court studies that included a suitable comparison sample and evaluated recidivism over at least one year post-discharge. In most instances, re-arrest rates for drug court and DWI court participants were approximately 15 percentage points lower than for comparable individuals on probation or adjudication as-usual.

Among the findings: In a nationally representative sample of more than 2,000 graduates from 95 different drug courts, the average re-arrest rate was only 16% in the first year after leaving the program and 27% after the second year (Roman et al., 2003). This compares highly favorably to typical recidivism rates on conventional probation, in which roughly 46% of offenders commit a new offense and over 60% commit a probation violation (e.g., Langan & Cunniff, 1992).

Table 2: Summary of Recent Recidivism Studies

Citation	Location(s)	No. of Drug Courts	Drug Court Re-arrest Rate	Comparison Group Re-arrest Rate
Roman et al. (2003)	Nationally representative sample	95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16% after 1 year • 27% after 2 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46% new offense • 60% probation violation
Carey et al. (2006)	California statewide study	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29% after 4 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% after 4 years
Michigan SCAO & NPC Research, (2007)	Michigan state study (DWI Courts)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5% to 18% by county after 2 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14% to 31% by county after 2 years
Rempel et al. (2003)	New York statewide study	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29% to 56% by county after 3 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% to 65% by county after 3 years
Brewster (2001)	Chester County, PA	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5% after 1 year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22% after 1 year
Gottfredson et al. (2002 & 2003)	Baltimore, MD	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32% after 1 year • 66% after 2 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57% after 1 year • 81% after 2 years
Rhodes et al. (2006)	Suffolk County, MA	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52%
Goldkamp & Weiland (1999)	Dade County, FL	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% after 18 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48% after 18 months
Fielding et al. (2002)	Los Angeles, CA	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24% after 1 year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37% after 1 year

A recent study of nine drug courts in California found that re-arrest rates over a 4-year period were 29% for drug court participants (and only 17% for drug court graduates) as compared to 41% for similar drug offenders who did not participate in drug court (Carey et al., 2006). Another study of four adult drug courts in Suffolk County, MA, found that drug court participants were 13% less likely to be re-arrested, 34% less likely to be re-convicted and 24% less likely to be re-incarcerated than probationers who had been carefully matched to the drug court participants using sophisticated “propensity score” analyses (Rhodes et al., 2006).

A recent three-county evaluation of DWI courts in Michigan found that DWI court participants were substantially less likely than comparable DWI offenders sentenced to probation to be arrested for a new DWI offense or any new criminal offense within 2 years of entering the programs. Participants in the DWI Courts also averaged fewer numbers of re-offenses and remained arrest-free for significantly longer periods of time after leaving the programs (Michigan State Court Administrative Office & NPC Research, 2007).

These effects on recidivism can be long-term: A recent long-term evaluation of the Multnomah County (Portland, OR) Drug Court found that crime was reduced by 30% *over 5 years* and the effects on crime were still detectable an astounding *14 years* from the date of arrest (Finigan et al., 2007). In fact, results from many drug court studies have revealed that effects on recidivism can last for several years, with the largest effects becoming most apparent after 2 years.

Cost-Benefit Analyses

In line with their demonstrated effects on crime, drug courts have proven to be highly cost-effective. Table 3 summarizes the results of several recent studies that computed the average cost savings per participant. Results revealed average cost savings ranging from nearly \$3,000 to over \$12,000 per client. Depending upon the size of a given drug court program, in some counties the aggregate cost savings exceeded \$7 to \$9 million per year. On average, every \$1.00 spent on drug courts was estimated to result in cost savings of \$1.74 to \$6.32 per participant.

Among the findings: An economic analysis in Washington State concluded that drug courts cost an average of \$4,333 per client but saved \$4,705 for taxpayers and \$4,395 for potential crime victims, thus yielding a net cost-benefit of \$4,767 per client (Aos et al., 2006). Another economic analysis in California concluded that drug courts cost an average of about \$3,000 per client but saved an average of \$11,000 per client over the long term (Carey et al., 2006).

Notably, the Multnomah County Drug Court was found to cost *less* than probation for drug offenders because probationers typically have multiple failed treatment experiences that are very expensive but elicit few gains. Factoring in cost-offsets from reduced arrests resulted in net savings of \$6,744 per participant and \$12,218 when victimization was also accounted for (Finigan et al., 2007).

Table 3: Summary of Recent Cost-Benefit Studies

Citation	Location(s)	No. of Drug Courts	Avg. benefit for every \$1 invested	Average cost savings per participant	Total projected cost savings
Aos et al. (2006)	National data	57	N/A	• \$4,767	N/A
Barnoski & Aos (2003)	Washington state study	5	• \$1.74	• \$2,888	N/A
Loman (2004)	St. Louis Felony Drug Court	1	• \$2.80 after 2 years • \$6.32 after 4 years	• \$2,615 after 2 years • \$7,707 after 4 years	• \$298,399 after 4 years
Carey et al. (2006)	California statewide study	9	• \$3.50	• \$11,000	• \$9 million per year
Finigan et al. (2007)	Multnomah County, OR Drug Court	1	• \$2.63	• \$6,744 in CJ costs • \$12,218 including victimization	• \$7.9 million per year

Citations

- Aos, S., Miller, M., & Drake, E. (2006). *Evidence-based public policy options to reduce future prison construction, criminal justice costs, and crime rates*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Barnoski, R., & Aos, S. (2003, March). *Washington State's drug courts for adult defendants: Outcome evaluation and cost-benefit analysis*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Brewster, M. P. (2001). An evaluation of the Chester County (PA) drug court program. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 31, 177-201.
- Carey, S. M., Finigan, M., Crumpton, D., & Waller, M. (2006). California drug courts: Outcomes, costs and promising practices: An overview of phase II in a statewide study. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, SARC Supplement 3*, 345-356.
- Fielding, J. E., Tye, G., Ogawa, P. L., Imam, I. J., & Long, A. M. (2002). Los Angeles County drug court programs: Initial results. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 23, 217-224.
- Finigan, M., Carey, S. M., & Cox, A. (2007, April). *The impact of a mature drug court over 10 years of operation: Recidivism and costs*. Portland, OR: NPC Research, Inc.
- Goldkamp, J. S., & Weiland, D. (1999). *Assessing the impact of Dade County's felony drug court (Final report)*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Gottfredson, D. C., & Exum, M.L. (2002). The Baltimore City Drug Treatment Court: One-year results from a randomized study. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 39, 337-356.
- Gottfredson, D. C., Najaka, S. S., & Kearley, B. (2003). Effectiveness of drug treatment courts: Evidence from a randomized trial. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 2, 171-196.
- Langan & Cuniff. (1992). *Recidivism of felons on probation*. Washington DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Latimer, J., Morton-Bourgon, K., & Chretien, J. (2006). *A meta-analytic examination of drug treatment courts: Do they reduce recidivism?* Canada Dept. of Justice, Research & Statistics Division.
- Loman, L. A. (2004). *A cost-benefit analysis of the St. Louis City Adult Felony Drug Court*. St. Louis, MO: Institute of Applied Research.
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Holsinger, A. M., & Latessa, E. J. (2005). Are drug courts effective: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Community Corrections*, Fall, 5-28.
- Michigan State Court Administrative Office, & NPC, Research. (2007, October). *Michigan DUI Courts outcome evaluation: Final Report*. Portland, OR & Lansing, MI: Authors.
Available at http://www.npcresearch.com/Files/MI_DUI_Outcome_Evaluation_FINAL.pdf.
- Rempel, M., Fox-Kralstein, D., Cissner, A., Cohen, R., Labriola, M., Farole, D., Bader, A., & Magnani, M. (2003, October). *The New York State adult drug court evaluation*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.
- Rhodes, W., Kling, R., & Shively, M. (2006). *Suffolk County Court Evaluation*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.

- Roman, J., Townsend, W., & Bhati, A. S. (2003). *Recidivism rates for drug court graduates: Nationally based estimate - Final report*. Washington DC: The Urban Institute and Caliber.
- Shaffer, D. K. (2006). *Reconsidering drug court effectiveness: A meta-analytic review*. Las Vegas, NV: Dept. of Criminal Justice, University of Nevada.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2005). *Adult drug courts: Evidence indicates recidivism reductions and mixed results for other outcomes* [No. GAO-05-219]. Washington, DC: Author.
- Wilson, D. B., Mitchell, O., & MacKenzie, D. L. (2006). A systematic review of drug court effects on recidivism. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 2, 459-487.